

25X1A

ACFT 125

5 JAN 67

NOTES OF INTEREST

SECRET

ROUTING

TO :
FROM :
ACTION:
INFO :

CHIEF
D/CHIEF
OPS
PLAN 25X1A

INITIATIVE INFO

HOLD
T.H.
FILE

IN-54536

25X1A

OSA 1-20

TO : SECRET 082200Z CITE

25X1A

CITE

25X1A

OXCAR SECUR

1. THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE LOS ANGELES HERALD-EXAMINER ON 8 FEBRUARY 67. ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN BY VINCENT X. FLAHERTY, ENTITLED "THE WILD BLUE YONDER" WHICH IS THE FOURTH IN A SERIES. THE THREE PREVIOUS ARTICLES WERE UNRELATED TO THE INFO QUOTED HEREIN.

2. QUOTE

EDWARDS MYSTERY PLANES FLOWN BY VETERAN PILOT

THE CRASH OF THE SR-71, AMERICA'S SPY PLANE, IS A MYSTERY THAT PERSISTS TO THIS MOMENT. THIS FOURTH ARTICLE IN A SERIES TELLS THE STORY OF WHAT MAY BE THE WORLD'S MOST FANTASTIC AIRPLANE

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, CALIF, FEB. 8 -- ON JAN. 5 THE LOCKHEED SR-71 SPY PLANE, PRAISED BY PRESIDENT JOHNSON AS BEING "CAPABLE OF WORLD-WIDE RECONNAISSANCE," TOOK OFF FROM HERE ON A ROUTINE TEST FLIGHT. IT WAS ONLY ONE OF PERHAPS A HUNDRED SUCH TESTS FOR

SECRET

3

25X1A

Approved For Release 2001/04/17 : CIA-RDP71B00590R000100090001-6

IN-54536

2350

S E C R E T

PAGE 2

THIS GREAT AIRPLANE.

BUT THIS TIME IT DIDN'T RETURN. IT LOST CONTACT WITH RADAR AND TELEMETRY STATIONS ALONG THE WAY.

THE NEXT DAY AN AIR FORCE HELICOPTER SEARCH CREW FOUND THE WRECKAGE. THE SR-71 HAD CRASHED IN THE RUGGED, MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY NEAR THE DECAYING GHOST TOWN OF LEITH, NEV. THE TEST PILOT WAS MISSING.

SUCH TIGHT SECRECY SURROUNDED THE MOVEMENTS OF THIS AVANT-GARDE AIRCRAFT THAT THE AIR FORCE REFUSED TO DIVULGE THE PILOT'S NAME UNTIL TWO DAYS LATER, ON JAN. 7. HE WAS WALTER L. RAY, OF LOCKHEED, WHO KNEW ALL THERE WAS TO KNOW ABOUT THE SR-71. HE WAS FOUND TEN MILES FROM THE WRECKAGE.

WHETHER HE TRIGGERED HIS EJECTION SEAT AND HIS PARACHUTE FAILED TO OPEN, THE AIR FORCE REFUSED TO SAY. THIS RATHER ROUTINE DETAIL, AMONG OTHERS, PROBABLY WON'T BE KNOWN FOR THREE OR FOUR MONTHS FROM NOW, OR UNTIL A TEAM OF AIRCRAFT EXPERTS SIFT OUT EVERY TANGIBLE FRAGMENT OF EVIDENCE.

EVEN THE LOCKHEED AIRCRAFT CORP., FOR WHICH RAY WORKED, REFUSED TO GIVE OUT ANY INFORMATION ABOUT THE TEST PILOT, EXCEPT THE NAMES OF HIS NEXT OF KIN. RAY WAS THE FOURTH TEST PILOT OUT OF EDWARDS TO LOSE HIS LIFE IN SEVEN MONTHS.

IF YOU EVER VISITED EDWARDS YOU WOULD READILY UNDERSTAND THE MAXIMUM SECURITY CLOAKING THE CRASH OF THE SR-71.

SECRECY HERE IS STANDARD PROCEDURE AND SR-71 UNDOUBTEDLY IS ONE OF THE MOST CAREFULLY GUARDED SECRETS ON THE BASE. FOR MANY MONTHS PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE BIG SPY PLANE WERE STRICTLY PROHIBITED.

S E C R E T

Approved For Release 2001/04/17 : CIA-RDP71B00590R000100090001-6

MEAGER INFORMATION GIVEN OUT ABOUT SR-71 INDICATE IT MIGHT BE THE MOST FANTASTIC AIRPLANE IN THE WORLD. THE AIR FORCE ADMITS IT IS CAPABLE OF TRIPLE-SONIC SPEEDS OF "MORE THAN 2000 MILE PER HOUR." IT IS SAID TO FLY HIGHER AND FASTER THAN THE YF-12A, CURRENT HOLDER OF THE WORLD SPEED AND ALTITUDE RECORDS.

IT MAY BE CAPABLE OF REACHING SPEEDS BEYOND FOUR TIMES THE SPEED OF SOUND. PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S STATEMENT REVEALING "WORLD WIDE RECONNAISSANCE" CAPABILITY STRETCHES THE IMAGINATION.

APPARENTLY TEST PILOT RAY WAS FLYING THE "HIGH RANGE," AS THE HIGH ALTITUDE COURSE IS KNOWN HERE. THIS AERIAL CORRIDOR STRETCHES FOR 485 MILES AND IS 50 MILES WIDE. IT RUNS ARROW STRAIGHT FROM EDWARDS OVER BEATTY AND ELY, NEV., TO WENDOVER, UTAH.

AIRCRAFT CAPABLE OF TREMENDOUS ALTITUDE ARE TESTED OVER THIS CHANNEL. SR-71 IS ONE OF THEM. SO IS ITS ALMOST LOOKALIKE, THE YF-12A ADVANCED INTERCEPTOR.

"OFFICIALLY" THE YF-12A IS THE FASTEST, HIGHEST-FLYING AIRPLANE IN THE WORLD WITH ITS SPEED AND ALTITUDE RECORDS RECOGNIZED BY THE SOCIETE AERONAUTIQUE FRANCAIS, THE WORLD GOVERNING BODY FOR INTERNATIONAL RECORDS.

YOU ARE NOT TOLD HOW FAST OR HIGH SR-71 HAS FLOWN OVER THE "HIGH RANGE" WHICH IS ALSO THE AERIAL RACE TRACK FOR THE X-15 AND THE XB-70. IT IS PRETTY MUCH A GUESSING GAME AFTER YOU ARE TOLD IT SPEEDS BEYOND 2000 M.P.H., AND FLIES HIGHER THAN 80,000.

ALL YOU LEARN HERE ABOUT PREVIOUS SR-71 FLIGHTS IS THAT IT HAS OFTEN LEFT EDWARDS FOR LONG HOURS AND HAS RETURNED WITHOUT A HINT OF WHERE IT HAS BEEN. WHEN NOT FLYING IT IS UNDER ARMED GUARD IN

S E C R E T

25X1A

Approved For Release 2001/04/17 : CIA-RDP71B00590R000100090001-6

IN-54536

2050

S E C R E T

PAGE 4

A LOCKED HANGER IN A FENCED-OFF SECURITY AREA.

SR-71 ISN'T THE MOST GRACEFUL-LOOKING AIRCRAFT THAT HAS EVER FLOWN, BUT IT IS PROBABLY CAPABLE OF GREATER ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAN ANY OTHER.

IT IS A BLACK, MISSILE-SHAPED AIRPLANE WITH STUBBY WINGS AT THE REAR IN WHICH ARE SET TWO HUGE TURBOJET ENGINES. MADE OF TITANIUM, IT IS CAPABLE OF RESISTING INTENSE HEAT.

THE DAY SR-71 WAS REPORTED MISSING, A WAVE OF GLOOM BUCKLED THE STURDY FACADE OF STOICISM THAT NORMALLY PERVADES THE EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE AT EDWARDS. TEST PILOTS HATE THE LOSS OF A GREAT AIRCRAFT BUT, AMONG THEIR NUMBER, WHEN WORD OF THE CRASH GOT AROUND, THEIR FIRST QUESTION WAS: "WAS FOXIE FLYING IT?"

FOR HOURS THE NAME OF WALTER L. RAY, THE ACTUAL PILOT, WASN'T REVEALED. SOME OF THE TEST PILOTS DIDN'T KNOW HIM BECAUSE RAY SPENT MOST OF HIS TIME AT THE LOCKHEED PLANT.

HOWEVER, "FOXIE," THE NICKNAME OF 45-YEAR-OLD COL. ROBERT L. STEPHENS, IS A KIND OF A HERO AMONG HEROES AT EDWARDS AND HIS NAME IS SYNONYMOUS WITH THE SR-71 AND THE YF-12A.

THEY ARE HIS BABIES. AND HE IS IN DIRECT CHARGE OF THEIR TESTS AND DEVELOPMENT.

STEPHENS, WHO HAS BEEN TESTING AIRCRAFT AT EDWARDS FOR 12 YEARS, IS THE BEST KNOWN PILOT AT THE BASE. HE GOT THE NICKNAME "SILVER FOX" WHEN HE WAS A FIGHTER PILOT IN EUROPE DURING WORLD WAR II. HIS HAIR TURNED GRAY WHEN HE WAS ONLY 23. NOW IT IS WHITE.

PREMATURELY GRAY HAIR, BUT THE WAY, SEEMS TO BE AN OCCUPATIONAL TRADE AMONG TEST PILOTS.

LAST YEAR, ALONG WITH COL. DANIEL ANDRE, AS FIRE CONTROL

Approved For Release 2001/04/17 : CIA-RDP71B00590R000100090001-6

S E C R E T

25X1A

Approved For Release 2001/04/17 : CIA-RDP71B00590R000100090001-6

IN-54536

2050

S E C R E T

PAGE 5

SYSTEMS OPERATOR. STEPHENS SET NINE WORLD SPEED AND ALTITUDE RECORDS IN THE YF-12A INTERCEPTOR, SHATTERING THE SOVIET UNION'S BEST EFFORTS BY WIDE MARGINS.

STEPHENS AND ANDRE AVERAGED BETTER THAN 2000 MILES PER HOUR AND SOARED BEYOND 80,000 FEET, A NEW HIGH FOR SUSTAINED HORIZONTAL FLIGHT.

STEPHENS AND ANDRE HAVE BEEN AWARDED THE MACKAY, THOMPSON AND FLYING TIGER TROPHIES, PLUS THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS, FOR THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

WHEN NEWS CIRCULATED AROUND THE BASE THAT THE SR-71 HAD CRASHED, WITH ONLY A PILOT ABOARD, EVERYONE QUITE NATURALLY FIGURED IT HAD TO BE STEPHENS. WHENEVER SR-71 OR YF-12A TOOK OFF, HE USUALLY WAS THE PILOT.

HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THESE TWO GREAT JETS PRECIPITATED A RUNNING GAG AROUND THE BASE. WHENEVER ONE OF THE TWO LONG-RANGE PLANES WAS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN FLYING, STEPHENS COULDN'T ENTER THE OFFICER'S CLUB WITHOUT SOMEONE KIDDING: "HOW WAS HONOLULU TODAY, FOXIE?", OR: "HOW ARE THINGS IN NEW YORK?"

STEPHENS SIMPLY GRINS FOR HE IS NOT ALLOWED TO GIVE OUT ANY INFORMATION ABOUT THE TWO JETS BEYOND WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN.

WITH 20 YEARS AS A TEST PILOT, 12 YEARS LOGGED HERE, STEPHENS NEVER HAS HAD A SERIOUS ACCIDENT, BUT HE HAS HAD ANXIOUS MOMENTS.

TWICE, WHILE FLYING 1400 MILES PER HOUR, OR TWICE THE SPEED OF SOUND, HE HAS EXPERIENCED "FLAME OUTS." BOTH TIMES HE DEAD-STICKED IN FOR GLIDE LANDINGS.

JOY STEPHENS, FOXIE'S WIFE OF 16 YEARS, NEVER ASKS HER HUSBAND

S E C R E T

Approved For Release 2001/04/17 : CIA-RDP71B00590R000100090001-6

IN-54536

2050

S E C R E T

PAGE 6

QUESTIONS WHEN HE GETS HOME FROM WORK BECAUSE SHE KNOWS HE'LL GIVE HER DEAD-STICK ANSWERS.

AS FAR AS THEIR THREE DAUGHTERS ARE CONCERNED (THEY ARE 7 TO 12 IN AGE) TEST FLYING IS AS NORMAL AS ANY OTHER KIND OF JOB.

JOY HAS NEVER BEEN OUT TO THE FLIGHT LINE TO SEE HER HUSBAND TAKE OFF OR LAND; IN FACT SHE SEEMS TO THINK IT RATHER RIDICULOUS THAT SUCH A QUESTION SHOULD BE RAISED.

"OF COURSE I'VE NEVER BEEN OUT HERE," SHE SAYS QUICKLY. "LORD, NO! THAT'S HIS JOB. OTHER WIVES DON'T GO TO THE OFFICE TO SEE WHAT THEIR HUSBANDS ARE DOING, DO THEY?"

UNQUOTE

3. AS OF THIS AFTERNOON, [REDACTED] HAD RECEIVED NO INQUIRIES RE THIS MATTER. [REDACTED] WILL KEEP SECURITY POSTED RE ANY CONTACTS MADE WITH HIS OFFICE.

S E C R E T TOR: 082258Z FEB 67

S E C R E T